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ABSTRACT

This document presents Life Development Visualization as an effective counseling technique to be used in combination with other career exploration activities with groups of high school students or recent graduates. Visualization is described as a process orientation which blends an individual's personality and spiritual levels into a comprehensive whole and which provides a growth model for human development. It is emphasized that specific counseling techniques within visualization should be selected according to the individual and general situation, personality types, unique goals, and desired path of development of the students. Suggested techniques include guided imagery, awareness activities, symbolic art, meditation, well development, journal keeping, centering, focusing, and mind play. A set of four exercises, designed to aid students in examining some questions relative to what is of value and importance in their lives is described. The exercises presented, which can be completed in a 2 to 3 hour session, involve relaxation techniques, visualization, and imagery. Four questions to ask students are given: (1) where am I now in my life; (2) where do I want to go in my life; (3) what is blocking me; and (4) how can I get there. Instructions are given for helping students to relax, answer each question with a symbol, draw their symbols, and share their drawings. Materials needed are listed and it is noted that counselors using visualization will need student volunteers and support from both administrators and parents. (NB)

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WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND
RECENT GRADUATES FOR CAREER EXPLORATION**

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by

Dennis "Dino" Lampron

PREFACE

Working with high school students in Career Exploration and Development can be an overwhelming task, when one-to-one sessions are the primary mode of delivery services. One effective method of working in this area of guidance-counseling is to use Life Development Visualization in larger groups of high school students or recent graduates. These methods have been successfully used with other population groups such as the unemployed and other career-crisis intervention situations.

Life-Development and Visualization

Life-Development Visualization blends major aspects of the time dimensions of where we are, where do we want to go, what is blocking us, and what do we need to get there. In addition, counselors can extend much more beyond typical one-to-one "talk therapy" by using art, symbols, and small groups as an appropriate means toward openness, resolution, and change.

The topic of Using Life Development Visualization with High School Students and Recent Graduates was first inspired from an all-day intensive pre-conference workshop

during the Association for Humanistic Psychology's (AHP) 13th Annual Midwest Regional Conference: Me, You and Us: Becoming held last October, 1982 in Rosemont, Illinois; Presented by Jennifer Andrews and Betty Boslel.

Visualization within a structured format such as presented during this workshop, can help students contact with the inner resources of their life along its developmental course. It can be used as an instrument for self-guidance by helping to crystallize decisions clients need to make, to identify goals and to find the meaning of their own unique life.

The progressive exercises can be an effective method of working both privately and in groups. Moreover, it can be used at inner levels while harmonizing and blending our process of growth and development. Each student would be seen as having intrinsic meaning, just as there is meaning in the world and the universe. The beginning is always where the student is, trusting the student's process and knowing that the answers are within them. The following rationale and suggested exercises are only a vehicle to facilitate that process. Hopefully our students will be able to establish a large overview in which they can recognize the cycles of change within the context of continuity, i.e., where am I in this movement of life in so far as the past is over and the future has not yet transpired. This midpoint is an open moment of possibility in development.

In the end, many of us can refer to life's development as if we are dancers joining the dance of our life as it is going

on and continuing towards its fulfillment. As Sam Keon said on the last page of his book, Beginnings Without End (New York: Harper & Row, 1968): "So long as there is hope there will be no absolute endings. If, by grace and grit, I live as I want I will end in the middle, still ready to...."

Visualization

Visualization blends our personality and spiritual levels into a comprehensive whole. It is one representation of the natural tendency in each of us to harmonize and synthesize our various aspects at higher (lower) levels of organization. As a growth model for human development, visualization assumes an inherent trust in the process of growth. Beginning where the person is and knowing that answers for change and development are within the person. It is also assumed that all persons have blocks that can be changed or modified so that a natural flow evolves moving through visualization towards their goals/purposes in life and the expression of those purposes.

Visualization is a process orientation and therefore not always defined by specific techniques. Guidelines, personal experience and study will help make them more powerful, but as long as a technique is employed with a clear and personal understanding of its purpose, potential effects and the needs it is meant to fulfill should have positive results. In light of these assumptions, techniques should be selected and adopted according

to the individual and general situation, personality types, unique goals and desired path of development. Some useful techniques used in visualization could include: guided imagery, awareness activities, symbolic art, meditation, well development, journal keeping, centering, focusing, mind play and others.

Visualization and the other processes are only one group of many that go beyond or at least can complement traditional talk therapy which is the preferred modality of school counseling and other formal helping relationships. What follows are sample exercises that you can adapt for use in your own settings, either professionally or personally:

Four Existential Questions Explored Through Life Development Visualization

This series of exercises were designed to aid the student in examining some questions relative to what is of value and what is important in their life at this moment. These exercises involve the use of visualization and imagery, where they will be asked to allow a symbol or image to come in answer to the questions. These questions can be left general, as they are here, or can be specifically designed to examine interpersonal, work, or whatever the focus of the group is that you are working with.

If you encourage persons to add to their responses after they have left the session, they will find that the questions and their responses to them, especially through their drawings, will continue to deepen. You may wish to add some additional direction during

the exercise, or not go to as deep a level as is possible. The exercises are written in their briefest format and require that you breathe life into them through your own wording:

Step one. Students relax and center. (My preference is for attunement through breathing, followed by a centering into the place of the observer, knower, self.)

Step two. Align students will (intent) to do the exercise, i.e. choosing to participate.

Step three. Go deeper into self (option).

Step four. You may want to address the student groups as follows:

"I am going to ask you some questions. For each question allow an image or symbol to come in to answer the question. As soon as you have the image or symbol then draw or represent this in any method you have in front of you. If you find there are also words or phrases that come to mind as you are doing the drawing, then jot them down. When you have finished just turn that drawing over and allow yourself to return to a centered position while they wait for the rest to finish.

Now quietly observe your feelings and your thoughts. Let them be there and let them also come to rest...

Now find a quiet place inside where you can be open, receptive, and patient; where you can receive responses from within. Allow yourself to abide in that place as you contemplate the first question...

1. Now ask yourself: "Where am I now in my life?" Allow images, sensations, feelings, thoughts to arise in response... simply observe them... When you feel ready, find a way of capturing that response on paper, in colors, shapes, symbols, or pictures. Open your eyes and begin drawing.

When you finish, set that drawing aside and once again close your eyes and quiet your body, feelings, and thoughts. Seek your place of quiet receptivity again...

2. Now ask yourself: "What is emerging in my life now? What is my next step? Where do I want to go with my life?" Again observe and trust whatever images, sensations, feelings, and thoughts arise...Find a way of representing and recording your response on paper and begin drawing.

When you finish, set the drawing aside and return to your quiet place within...

3. Now ask yourself: "What is getting in my way? What is holding me back? What is blocking me?" Observe your response and draw.

Set this drawing aside and return to quiet...

4. Now ask yourself: "What do I need to develop in order to take my next step and to move through my block? What quality do I need to develop in my life? What do I need to get to where I want to be?" Take your time now to allow images, sensations, and feelings to respond.

Observe, trust, and draw whatever comes.*

After each question have the students recenter, reaffirm their intent, and then, after a relaxation, ask the next question. After each question have them turn drawings over and further identify each picture to include feelings as well as other descriptions. When students have finished all four drawings, see again if there is anything they would like to add. Ask them to note if there is one they do not understand, to stay with it and see what their unconscious ("Hearts" might be saying to them) to see what the personal meaning is in this drawing.

Step five. When working with this exercise always have the participants in a group share with one another after each picture. Groups of three to five seem to work best. This step of GROUNDING what has been done is very important. Remind students that they are not to diagnose, they are simply

*Adapted in part from the book, The Unfolding Self, by Melly Young Brown, Los Angeles: Psychosynthesis Press, 1983.

to listen to each other and help each other gain increased awareness, and perhaps help them explore further at what they need and how they may develop that quality. It is also best for each student to share only one picture at a time, and have four rounds; although in some situations the leader may want to do all the sharing at the end.

ADDED NOTES ON CRITICAL ISSUES

It is important that counselors have the support of both their administrator and parents. Signed waivers or even separate after-school sessions may be appropriate in some situations.

It is important that every student be a volunteer for both the session in general, and at every stage of Life Development Visualization. It is also critical that counselors allow time for debriefing both immediately following the session as well as follow-up opportunities.

Since this is a volunteer session, students may also "Volunteer themselves out" if their behavior is disruptive towards the overall goals of the group. It is important that the size of the total group not exceed 35 and that there be at least two facilitators, one specifically to help monitor the group.

Guidelines, limits, and consequences must be shared in advance of starting any sessions.

The atmosphere of the entire session should be relaxed, but quiet talking among students should be encouraged only during announced sharing stages.

Although timing will vary according to many factors, this set of four exercises could comfortably be done in a 2-3 hour time period.

Materials should include: (1) at least seven colors of magic markers, plus at least three extra black markers for each group of five, with drawing paper. (2) index cards for affirmation statements (3x5), (3) lined paper, pencils, and clipboards if necessary, (4) a good stereo and appropriate music (optional), and (5) other art materials, chalk, clay, water colors (optional).

AFFIRMATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Life Development Visualization should never be done in isolation of other career exploration activities. One of the most effective techniques you can use to ground the new dreams is writing affirmation of positive support (see the nine tips on Affirmations). They can be hitched to the dream (ultimate goal) as well as used to strengthen visualizations of those first few important steps of any immediate goal.

When you begin to explore inside yourselves, in looking toward change, you are more likely to find your own true answers to life's possibilities. By looking inside ourselves we can start to see beyond our old reality and open up to things as we would have them be, to choose what we want to experience. Using Life Development Visualization can help us know when we have been

riding on a dream, looking for that dream, to discover your own identity and your own direction, allowing you to become a free agent able to respond to what is happening NOW if you let it. And even if you decide to turn your back on what you find, you will at least be more aware that the sky is the limit when you choose to pursue your dream. If you can dream it, you can live it. The dream is the beginning of a cyclical process that propels us back to an awareness of the vibrant present where all beginnings originate. By using Creative Visualization often, we can learn to develop an inner silence, to cultivate the ability to let things happen, to welcome, to listen, to allow, and to be with our dreams, perhaps then to act toward some chosen future.

As Gerald G. Jampolsky, M.D. said in his book, Love is Letting Go of Fear:

I am responsible for What I see.

I choose the feelings and experience,
and I decide

upon the goal I would achieve.

And everything that seems to happen
to me,

I ask for,

and receive as I have asked.

AFFIRMATIONS

To affirm means to "make firm." An affirmation is a strong, positive statement that something is already so. It is a way of "making firm" that which you are imaging. Tips:

1. Always phrase in the most positive way you can. Affirm what you do want, not what you don't want.
2. In general, the shorter and simpler the affirmation the more effective; a clear statement conveys a strong feeling.
3. Choose or write affirmations that are totally right for you, feeling positive, expanding, freeing, and/or supportive.
4. Phrase in the present tense, not in the future, it is important to create it as if it already exists. Don't say, "I will get a wonderful job," but rather, "I now have this wonderful job."
5. You are creating something new and fresh, not trying to redo or change what already exists.
6. When using affirmations, try as much as possible to create a feeling of belief, an experience that they can be true.
7. Write your affirmations out in advance, then distill them to a catch word or phrase that you can easily remember when you are in a more suggestive state.
8. Affirmation can be done silently, spoken aloud, written down, or even sung or chanted. But be conscious of what you are telling yourself, try to get the feeling that you really have the power to create that reality (which in fact you do).

9. The more often you do them each day, imprint them into your mind, the more effective they will be. Repeat at least three times at each setting, with an emotion attached and not just as rote.
10. Some of the best times for making firm the intent of your affirmations are usually your waking or just before falling asleep. Of course, if you have one displayed on your bathroom mirror, then while brushing your teeth would be another best time.

*Ideas taken from the book, Creative Visualization by Shakti Gawain, Whatever Pub: 1978

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